

Message Text

SECRET

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44

ACTION SS-30

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FM USINT CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5330

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

S E C R E T CAIRO 0715

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCLR EG VS

SUBJECT: GOE REQUEST FOR HELP IN OVERFLIGHT OF SOUTH
VIETNAM

1. UNDERSECRETARY MOHAMED RIAD HAS ASKED FOR USG HELP IN OBTAINING RVN PERMISSION FOR EGYPTAIR TO OVERFLY SOUTH VIETNAM ON ITS ROUTE TO HONG KONG AND TOKYO. HE EXPLAINED THAT UNTIL DECEMBER 1973 EGYPTAIR OPERATED THRICE WEEKLY FLIGHTS TO THESE DESTINATIONS. THEY WERE ROUTED AROUND SOUTH VIETNAMESE TERRITORY, THEREBY COSTING EGYPTAIR AN ADDITIONAL QUARTER OF A MILLION DOLLARS PER YEAR IN FUEL COSTS. THESE HIGH COSTS CAUSED TEMPORARY SUSPENSION IN DECEMBER. IF PERMISSION TO OVERFLY SOUTH VIETNAM COULD BE OBTAINED, FLIGHTS WOULD BE RESUMED. EGYPTIAN MINISTER OF AVIATION IS ANXIOUS TO DO SO.

2. RIAD RECALLED THAT SUBJECT HAD BEEN DISCUSSED WITH MINISTER BERGUS AROUND MED-1971. (WE HAVE NO PERTINENT RECORD SINCE USINT DOCUMENTS WERE BURNED IN EARLY OCTOBER 1973.) AT THAT TIME WE HAD SUGGESTED EGYPTIANS SPEAK DIRECTLY TO RVN ABOUT THE MATTER. SINCE GOE HAD NO RELATIONS WITH RVN, IT COULD NOT DO SO. FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMY HAS NOW REQUESTED THAT USG "GOOD OFFICES" BE SOUGHT TO URGE RVN PERMIT SUCH FLIGHTS. IN ANSWER TO MY QUERY, RIAD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT GOE RECOGNIZES NOT ONLY NORTH KOREA, BUT ALSO VIET CONG. LATTER, IN FACT, HAS RESIDENT AMBASSADOR AND STAFF IN CAIRO UNDER THE DESIGNATION "VIETNAM REPUBLIC

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OF THE SOUTH." VIET CONG AUTHORITIES, RIAD RECALLED IN

ANSWER TO ANOTHER QUESTION, HAD BEEN RECOGNIZED BY GOE SOMETIME IN THE FALL OF 1971, THE IMPLICATION BEING AFTER OUR UNWILLINGNESS TO HELP.

3. I TOLD RIAD THAT, AS I WAS SURE HE MUST RECOGNIZE, THE EGYPTIAN REQUEST IS NOT AN EASY ONE. IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS BY NOW THAT VIET CONG REPRESENTATIVES UNABLE TO PRODUCE THE GOODS AND COULD NOT GRANT OVERFLIGHT RIGHTS. I EXPRESSED PERSONAL VIEW THIS MIGHT BE GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO JETTISON VIET CONG REPRESENTATION AND TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH RVN. I ALSO POINTED OUT EGYPTIAN REQUEST PUTS US IN AN EMBARRASSING POSITION. HOW COULD USG ASK RVN TO GRANT OVERFLIGHT PRIVILEGES FOR A GOVERNMENT WHICH FORMALLY RECOGNIZED VIET CONG INSURGENTS? IN ANY CASE, USG INFLUENCE WITH RVN IS LIMITED AND ON SUCH MATTERS RVN ALONE MAKES DECISION. RIAD ACKNOWLEDGED EGYPTIAN REQUEST IS AWKWARD, BUT PROFESSED TO BELIEVE WE HAD MORE INFLUENCE WITH RVN THAN I HAD SUGGESTED. HE REITERATED FAHMY HAD SPECIFICALLY ASKED THAT WE TRY TO HELP AND HAD DONE SO AT EGYPTIAN MINISTER OF AVIATION'S BEHEST. I SAID WE ALWAYS WISH TO BE HELPFUL WHERE POSSIBLE, BUT I COULD GIVE HIM NO ASSURANCE WHAT MIGHT BE FEASIBLE IN THIS CASE.

4. COMMENT: EGYPTIAN REQUEST CLEARLY POSES PROBLEM. ON ONE HAND, IN CONTEXT OF OUR MUTUAL DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN USG-GOE RELATIONS, WE WOULD BENEFIT HERE IF WE OFFERED OUR GOOD OFFICES. ON THE OTHER, I RECOGNIZE THAT IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT FOR RVN TO ACCEDE TO SUCH REQUEST BECAUSE OF THE POLITICAL POSTURE INTO WHICH EGYPTIANS HAVE SHORTSIGHTEDLY PLACED THEMSELVES. ALTHOUGH GOE HAS COME A LONG WAY THESE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, I DOUBT THAT IT IS YET READY TO JETTISON VIET CONG REPRESENTATION HERE AS QUID PRO QUO FOR OVERFLIGHT RIGHTS. AT THE SAME TIME, AN RVN PROPOSAL THAT THEY DO SO IN RETURN FOR SUCH RIGHTS COULD CONCEIVABLY BEGIN A DIALOGUE. SUBJECT EMBASSY SAIGON'S CONCURRENCE, I HOPE THAT WE MAY BE WILLING TAKE SOME LOW KEY SOUNDINGS TO ASCERTAIN RVN REACTION TO EGYPTIAN REQUEST.
EILTS

NOTE BY OC/T: EXDIS CAPTION ADDED PER INSTRUCTION SS-O. MR. TWOHIE. SECRET
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